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piss clear

Are dot.com yuppies killing Burning Man?

Probably. See inside.

Black Rock City's only alternative newspaper

photography by Adrian Roberts

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Nevada

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adrian's rant

The *Piss Clear* 2000 staff: PF, Adrian, Deidre, Stew, and Layne

Yeah, yeah, *we know*. But still, we just couldn't resist a good ol' sensationalistic cover. Besides, it's everyone's favorite hot-button topic — dot.com yuppies at Burning Man. As if it's something new.

The truth of the matter is, Black Rock City has always been a hotbed of privileged, dot.com economy boomers. Even back in the day. I remember when HotWired.com brought out practically their entire staff in a fleet of about eleven RVs, back in '95. The year before, they were actually *recruiting* out here, for chrissakes! This is old news.

Besides, who the hell do you think *pays* for all this shit here anyway? That's right, you guessed it! All these mind-blowing (and bank account-blowing) theme camps and art installations don't grow on trees, you know!

I'm personally grateful that there are so many egomaniacs in Black Rock City with no lives and plenty of disposable income, each one trying to out-do the other with bigger and better theme camps. Goodness knows I sure as hell couldn't afford it, but I'll be damned if I won't come out here and reap the benefits of someone else's IPO! All one has to do is walk along the Esplanade to see all that money being put to use.

Of course, there *is* a downside to Black Rock City's new economy. This is a monied, upper-class sort of town now, which means that you won't see just *anybody* out here anymore. Gone are the crusty, vagabond hippies and poor, starving artists — victims of BRC's increasing gentrification. The rising ticket prices have helped see to that, especially if one is prone to flakiness or indecision.

It's still cheaper than Disneyland

Then again, if you're *not* well-to-do, but you at least had your shit together seven months ago, you could have gotten in here for less that a Ben Franklin. We here at *Piss Clear* got our tickets for $95 a piece, simply because we bought them back in February. Not a bad deal, for what you're getting.

Come to think of it though, $200 isn't necessarily a bad deal either. Sure, it's a far cry from the $40 tickets from days of yore (1993), but I still think that it's one hell of a travel bargain, especially when you compare it to what you'd pay for any other vacation event. (Think about how much Disney World is for a week — not that Burning Man is Disney World, but you get the idea.) As long as you forego any elaborate theme camp ideas and don't go crazy with the camping provisions, you can still have one hell of a neat little vacation here for only a few hundred bucks.

Then again, I have some friends who went to Hawaii this year instead of Burning Man. Why? Because they did the math. It was actually cheaper for them.

Hi!

Miz Deidre

Smash the oligarchy! Sneak in to BM!

Of course, you could always avoid the ticket price altogether and try to smuggle yourself in. That's what *Piss Clear* inadvertently did last year when, just outside of Gerlach, I realized that my Burning Man ticket was still sitting safely on my desk back home in San Francisco. Fuck!

Not relishing the thought of shelling out the cash for another ticket, we frantically hid PF, the smallest member of our group, underneath about two tons of camping gear, and just narrowly passed the front gate "search-the-RV-for-freeloaders" inspection. Whew! That was a close one. This year, needless to say, I remembered my ticket.

PC on an SUV

So someone gave me shit yesterday because they saw a *Piss Clear* sticker on somebody's SUV here. As if I have any control over where our stickers end up. Please. It's not like we're selling out. When someone — say, like the Burning Man organization — gives us $20,000 to publish this newspaper, maybe *then* we can be accused of selling out. Until then, we'll be just as fiercely independent as we've always been.

Besides, even soulless, SUV-driving, dot.com yuppies need to piss clear, you know.

The Burning Man corporate newsletter

Speaking of selling out, why doesn't the *Black Rock Gazette* just come clean? To call themselves a "newspaper" is an erroneous half-truth that insults the intelligence of the citizens of Black Rock City. Everyone knows that they're simply shills for the BMorg. Hell, the *Gazette* is practically nothing more than a corporate newsletter. Don't believe me? Then read Lesself's enlightening article opposite this page.

Pissing clear at the Burn

You know what sucks? Being stuck in a crowd of 28,000 people, waiting for the Man to burn, and ... having to pee. I know this, because it has happened to me. Twice. And as you've probably figured out, there is absolutely no way you can make it out of the crowd, find a porta-potty (or even an open plot of playa), and make it back through the crowd to find your friends. Fuck it, once you're in the mob, you're pretty much stuck there until they burn that fucker down.

So what do you do? You suffer. Or you pee. I recommend the latter, especially if you're on drugs. Nothing spoils a drug trip more than having to pee. But how? Pissing on the ground isn't really an option, especially with every one crammed in so close — besides, it's rude. If you're lucky enough to have been born with a directional spout (really, it's far and away the best thing about being born genetically male) then you can do what I've done — pee into a bottle. Yes, sometimes, this is what it comes down to. I've had to do this twice now at the Burn. And you know what? Everyone's so captivated by all the shit going on around them, no one even notices. Trust me.

Your fearless editor pissed in this bottle at the Burn

Miz Deidre

I bet you have to go right now, don't you? Chances are, you're reading this while standing in line for the porta-potties, and all this talk about peeing probably isn't helping. We're sorry! We do hope that you're at least entertained, because — as you may have garnered — that is our job, first and foremost. And we like doing our job!

Enjoy these last couple of days at Burning Man, and we'll see you out on the playa!

Adrian

Freedom of the press? Not at Burning Man *by LESSELF*

Rules and regulations have straightened up Burning Man from the anarchist event it once was. (No semi automatics on the playa, please.) But it's still probably the only city in America where you can cruise the streets while strapped to a homemade crucifix on wheels, without being stopped by the authorities. Yep, Burning Man encourages individuality and freedom. Unless you're a member of the press.

In contrast to individual participants, who can raise nearly all the cain they want, the press is tightly controlled at Burning Man. Media have to submit a proposal, along with the angle they want to explore, for approval by Media Mecca, the public relations arm of BM. And sometimes, the answer is no.

"We turned down *Playboy* this year," says Evil Pippi, the former Captain of Media Relations of Burning Man, and a current Media Mecca volunteer. "They wanted to write purient-type stories about sex at Burning Man, and we're not interested in that," she says.

The *Black Rock Gazette:* an objective voice of the playa or a "feel-good" corporate newsletter? What do *you* think?

Adrian Roberts

real news

Sometimes media control is a beautiful thing. Who wants to see a bunch of bullshit articles published about Ecstasy orgies at Burning Man, or a special "MTV does Burning Man," complete with models trucked in with body paint?

But when it comes to Burning Man's own media, the organization holds the reins twice as tightly. And that's where it can sometimes get touchy.

Like a growing number of cities across the country, Black Rock City has a single daily newspaper, the *Black Rock Gazette*. Located in two air-conditioned trailers at Center Camp, the *Gazette* is staffed by a team of volunteer writers, editors, copy editors, designers, and production staff, and is published every evening on-site, with a little help from a Kinko's in Reno.

The *Gazette* publishes fun stories about Burning Man — food contests, theme camp reviews, and the like — mixed with breaking news about things going on around the city. Like the city's radio stations, the paper serves an important role in getting the word out when shit goes down in Black Rock City. Case in point: when a bomb went off at Burning Man last year, the paper covered it. Sort of.

In mid-morning during Burning Man last year, there was a loud explosion on the outskirts of camp. It sent ripples of black smoke up into the sky, and caused the windows on some of the houses in Gerlach to shake. It left a ten-foot wide crater, and a flurry of activity among local officials and the Burning Man organization, as they tried to assess the situation. What kind of bomb was it? Was it set off by a harmless Burning Man pyro, or someone with murderous intent, who may have planted other bombs?

The next morning, the *Black Rock Gazette* printed a story about the bomb, stating simply its location, and the fact that local law enforcement was investigating, and Burning Man was cooperating.

Later that afternoon, a participant named Dang (and magazine reporter by profession) stumbled upon a hot tip while attending a "Leave No Trace" seminar at Center Camp. His source, a federal employee, told him that there was more to the bomb story than what was initially reported, and proceeded to outline the details. Dang ran over to the news desk at the *Black Rock Gazette* to share his tip. The editors asked if he could write a follow-up story, and, after confirming the tip with local law officials, he wrote it. That afternoon, Dang's story was killed — the only story in the *Gazette*'s history to ever be killed by the BM powers-that-be. Why? Seems the bomb was too hot to touch — even for the local paper.

"The authorities were ready to shut the event down that day, and we didn't want to make it look like a huge emergency," says Shibumi, publisher of the *Gazette*. "I was being called upon to do damage control on the bomb threat."

Huh? A newspaper helping someone do damage control? That doesn't exactly sound ethical. But further conversation with Shibumi reveals that the *Gazette* is only "like" a newspaper.

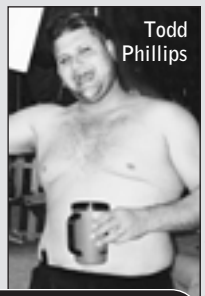
Censoring the paper is, in Shibumi's words, crucial for the survival of Burning Man. The event has a tenuous relationship with its partners — local law enforcement, the BLM, local historic associations, and mining groups that give it permission to operate each year. A negative article in the *Gazette* could potentially give any of these organizations the ammo it needs to shoot down Burning Man, says Shibumi. Wouldn't the BLM just *love* to get their hands on an article about Burning Man revelers trashing the local hot springs, for instance? But they never would, because the *Gazette* wouldn't print a word of it. Even if it was true. After all, the *Gazette* is fully funded by the Burning Man organization. That means its $20,000 a year budget is paid for, literally, by The Man. It has no choice but to stick to the party line.

But what about us, the hapless citizens of Black Rock City? Don't we have a right to know what is going on in our community? Informed citizenry provides the very basic tenants for a democracy, and you can't make sound decisions if you don't have all the facts. Burning Man isn't an anarchy anymore, it's sad, but true. But it isn't exactly a democracy either. So what is it? What do we want it to be?

Sophisticated 'Leave A Trace' philosophy espoused at BM2000

by TOKYO RICO

Todd Phillips, a drunken fraternity brother hailing from Bakersfield, California, today unveiled an environmental philosophy he calls 'Leave A Trace.' Burping loudly and thumbing the bridge of his "Shit Happens" baseball cap, Phillips urged all Burning Man attendees to follow his lead and adopt 'Leave A Trace' practices as their own. "Those who adopt this philosophy will be on the forefront of a major sea change in the way the Burning Man event is perceived by the Bureau of Land Management and the public at large. It's fucking rad!" exclaimed Phillips, who "shotgunned" beers throughout his presentation before chucking them haphazardly over his shoulder.



Todd Phillips

Adrian Roberts

fake news

"Unlike the outmoded 'Leave No Trace' philosophy," Phillips continued, "'Leave A Trace' is easy to understand and to implement. That's because it's based on the natural instincts of a modern city-dweller."

'Leave A Trace' stresses a careless disregard for the pristine beauty of nature, and promotes wasteful consumption. The main goal is to generate as much non-biodegradable trash as possible, as quickly as possible, and to leave it scattered over a vast expanse of wilderness. Other goals include permanently disfiguring unspoiled land and poisoning the atmosphere.

"Let's say you have a smoke," said Phillips, pulling out a lit cigarette. "Under 'Leave No Trace,' you'd have to stow the butt in your pocket. Whereas I simply drop it and let it land where it may." He noted that the same technique could be used with scrap paper, nails, and half-eaten watermelons.

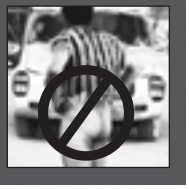
Phillips also demonstrated proper 'Leave A Trace' fire-starting etiquette. Soaking a large couch with gasoline, he then piled on several dozen steel-belted monster truck tires, along with shards of plastic and glass. Next came chunks of crumbled styrofoam. Setting the whole thing ablaze, Phillips watched as a thirty-foot column of oily black smoke streamed into the air, raining soot down upon onlookers, and blotting out the sun. "Dude, this is what it must've been like back in 'Nam," he said, slightly awed at the display.

In addition to 'Leave A Trace', Phillips is a proponent of giant corporate media mergers and of the Strategic Defense Initiative. He's also the guy who invented those big billboards they mount on the backs of trucks and drive around in heavy traffic.

Random fashion tip

Men: Go topless, go totally nude, but do not go merely bottomless. There is something very creepy about a bottomless man.

— Tokyo Rico



I remember when they let you burn shit

by MALDEROR

Adrian Roberts

You know what I miss most about Burning Man of old? Fire. I know, I know, you've heard all the old-timers pissing and moaning about how Burning Man has changed, and how it's so different now, and blah blah blah. This is all true, of course. Burning Man used to be about getting together in the desert, drinking beer, and blowing shit up. But it caught on so well that we now have this beautiful community of artists and free-thinkers, numbering in the thousands. Unfortunately, this large community brought a whole slew of rules and regulations along with it. Chief amongst these rules in '99 was a ban on fires in your campsite. And fires used to be a pretty important part of the Burn.

And I'm not just talking about fire as a source of warmth. Sure, last year's bite-ass freezing temperatures absolutely sucked without a central fire to huddle around. Our camp spent the nights last year shivering around a tiny Coleman stove, for chrissakes. But there was a city-wide ban on campfires, and we adhered to it, even in the face of near-freezing temperatures. It's amazing how cold the back of a Ryder truck can get when you're forced to attempt sleep there. (A Ryder truck, you ask? Yeah, we had to move into our truck after the windstorms got so severe that our tent poles snapped. Twice. Oh, are you a newbie? Welcome to Black Rock City, the Least Friendly Place on Earth, Environmentally Speaking.)

last rant

But I'm really talking about fire as a nexus for that "community" vibe that Burning Man is supposed to engender. Before we had the DPW and roads and blocks and streets and all that cool infrastructure, Black Rock City was just sort of thrown together organically, with people camping wherever the hell they felt like camping. (This worked pretty well with 5000 people. But it's really hard to find your friends' theme camp in a crowd of 28,000, so the roads are a welcome change.) At night, one used to wander from campfire to campfire, with the warmth of the flames and the warmth of the people drawing you in. You'd amble up to a fire, and join into conversation with your fellow participants. Campfires served the very real community-building purpose of helping you meet your neighbors. I wandered up to Spiral Camp's vast central fire in 1994, and spent the rest of the evening hanging out with my new friends. It's not the same feeling to wander up to somebody's strobe light. In fact, without campfires, I tend to not wander into strange camps at night at all.

At night, Black Rock City used to look like a Roman encampment, with a fire in the center of every ring of tents. Now, if one is drawn to a light, it's probably the laser of a booming trance sound system, and you're more likely to "get your groove on" than to talk to people. It's ironic that that which draws us here — fire, in the form of the burning of the Man — no longer binds us together on a community level.

But whatever.

haiku

You coast three feet on
A hundred dollar scooter
Try walking, jerk-off!

— Bryan Finch

Everything you trade
You bought before
you got here
No commerce my ass

In the desert sun
A pint of Ben & Jerry's
Freezers rock my world

Drank enough water
But still pissing
bright yellow
Ah! The vitamins

Seven years ago
The fire lingam was cool
Now the opera sucks

Burning Man costs more
Than going to Hawaii
Next year: Aloha!

— PF

My playa breakfast:
Pop Tarts, chips,
pepperoni
And 5htp

We shout, "Spectator!"
At a man in jeans
and hat
It's Larry Harvey

Please, burn the
Man quick
My dry ice has melted and
I miss my cat, Bob

— Tokyo Rico

At night piss all seems
Streams kinda
greyish blue but
It sure smells the same

— Gavin Heck

Harry Larvey takes
Another jolly bong rip
Your ticket money!

— Dr. Cliff